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## **Lessons Learned From a Motorcoach Accident**

### **NTSB Urges State and Federal Officials to Ban Cell Phone Use by Motorcoach, Transit and School Bus Drivers**

A serious accident that destroyed the roof of a motorcoach and injured 11 students, including one seriously, has prompted the National Transportation Safety Board (NTSB) to urge federal and state governments to prohibit motorcoach, transit, and school bus drivers from using cell phones while driving those vehicles, except in emergencies.

The call for a cell phone ban stems from the NTSB's recently adopted report on a bus accident that occurred on November 14, 2004, on the George Washington Parkway in Alexandria, Virginia. The motorcoach was making a 60-mile trip from Baltimore Washington International Airport to Mount Vernon, and was traveling in the right lane of the parkway, the second of two buses traveling together. About 10:40 a.m., the bus struck a bridge. There were signs warning of the 10-foot, 2-inch vertical clearance for the right lane and the 13-foot, 4-inch vertical clearance for the left lane. The 2000 Prevost, 58-passenger bus, operated by Eyre Bus Service, Inc., was 12 feet high.

The bus driver said he had been talking on a hands-free cell phone at the time of the accident. Records from the bus driver's personal cell phone service provider showed that the bus driver initiated a 12-minute call at 10:23 a.m. the morning of the accident, the NTSB said. The driver said that he saw neither the warning signs nor the bridge itself before the impact. Evidence indicates that he did not apply any brakes before impacting the bridge. The NTSB concluded that the bus driver's cell phone conversation at the time

of the accident diverted his attention from driving. As a result, he failed to notice the low-clearance warning signs for the bridge and the low vertical clearance of the bridge itself.

The NTSB wants the Federal Motor Carrier Safety Administration and the 50 States and District of Columbia to prohibit CDL holders with a passenger-carrying or school bus endorsement from using cell phones while driving those vehicles, except in emergencies. The NTSB also urged bus associations and unions to adopt the same ban for their members.

All Eyre bus drivers are issued company-owned cell phones before a trip. At the time of the accident, Eyre permitted its drivers to use a cell phone while driving if the driver used a hands-free device. The day after the accident, the motor carrier instituted a policy prohibiting the use of cell phones while operating company equipment. The new policy requires that drivers, except in an emergency, safely stop their vehicle to make a cell phone call.

The NTSB is also concerned that the extent of the problem of cell phone use is unknown because of inadequate data, and the Board reiterated previous recommendations to the 20 states that do not have driver distraction codes on their accident investigation forms to add interactive wireless communication device use to those forms.

In its report, the NTSB also found that the low vertical clearance of the bridge, which does not meet current standards and is now considered an historic bridge, contributed to the accident.

A synopsis of the NTSB's report, including a complete list of conclusions and recommendations, is available on the Highway Publications page on the NTSB's Web site, [www.nts.gov](http://www.nts.gov).